"a"-1h-11

The belief of the Magyars in man's survival beyond the grave originates in pre-Christian times; it is deep-rooted and generally accepted. Death, therefore, is not necessarily a cause for sorrow. In his last minutes, the dying person, stretched out on the floor of the main living room, calmly takes leave from his family and friends who, in turn, entrust him with messages to be delivered to those he is about to join. The preparation of the corpse is the duty of women, who outfit the dead in his wedding attire or best outfit (in some regions, man, e.g., in white). In the coffin (mostly black but also blue, red, or green) they place food, tobacco, favorite tools, or toys, if the dead person was a child. The grave itself always faces east. The burial ceremony is followed by the tor which is today a simple banquet, but which used to be until quite recently an occasion of joyful celebration. This feast, as with all of the Ob-Ugric peoples, actually served the purpose of entertaining and propitiating the spirit of death.

Customs connected with marriage show surprising parallelisms with burial customs. Deceased spinsters are often buried in a wedding outfit and, in some regions, a young man who died before having a chance to get married will be given a symbolic bride who, clad in wedding attire, accompanies him to the grave and is supposed to mourn him as

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The end of life

761 We are all in God's hands: our time will be up one day, our candle burnt out, our star have vanished from the sky, just as it is set out in the Book of Fate... When the Great Reaper comes, the soul flies away, and the body starts on its last journey.

«There is no medecine against death,
Neither in the Pharmacy, nor else where...»

is one of the ways in which popular songs attempt to 763 console the mourners. When the hour of death has struck, man is drawn to the earth, he longs for it as though contact with it would deliver him from every evil, relieve him from his suffering, ease his last breath... The sick person is taken off the bed, and laid on the floor on a mat covered with a sheet. There he wrestles with death, [825] until his soul is liberated, and leaves his body. An owl, herald of death, hoots on the chimney: this bird of mourning is supposed to fly away following the dead person's soul, and it comes back with any new-born's soul. Its hoots are a ghostly presage, almost a signpost of the departing soul. People who hear it shudder, yet it is forbidden to cry in the presence of a dieing person, as tears might keep him back, making his departure more difficult; he might not be able to die because his soul would find it too hard to part with life.

761 It is not wise to play with death: the child must not 124 lie on his tummy, the owl must be driven away from the chimney; in our dream we must not have our teeth pulled out, nor must we sing funeral hymns without good reason, nor seat thirteen people at one table...

The last hour having struck, the window is opened before the departing soul as before a captive bird, because its way must not be barred. Otherwise it might not find peace and might return to disturb the living . . . 763 775

The dead person's bed is made up for the last time at home. He is then clothed in his death clothes which for a lifetime have been kept for him with the utmost care. Brides keep their wedding dresses, so that fifty or sixty years later they may be their death wear. In some parts the women begin to embroider their death sheet at the age of fourty, as they want to enter a better world wrapped in their own handiwork. Girls are laid on their death beds in white dresses with a bride's wreath on their heads: their bridegroom is waiting for them in another world . . . And a lad, who dies in his prime, is supposed to be the bridegroom of Heaven . . . The coffin, that eternal bed, was not always black. Only the old people's coffins used to be painted black, those of the young were pale or dark blue, green or white . . . 764

People used to be supplied with several things for this great journey. The old Hungarians were buried with their horses, bows, quivers, later on the head at least of their favourite horse was put by their side. With a woman were buried her sickle and her combs; with a child his toys, and if he died without being baptized, they put his little shirt and his swaddle by his side; sometimes needles and thread were also added.

Occasionally the dead person's favourite possessions were also put into the coffin as provision for his journey; they were meant to cheer and quieten him. In some instances even that which he last desired: food, a bottle of wine and a pipe are also put by his side. Godly people take with them their bible, their psalm book and their rosary twisted round their fingers. In some Hungarian villages